

# Wabash Reflections

A newsletter brought to you by the Wabash River Heritage Corridor Commission (WRHCC). The Wabash River Heritage Corridor Commission, representing the Wabash River Heritage Corridor, shall protect and enhance the natural, cultural, historical, and recreational resources and encourage sustainable development of the corridor.

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## **What is and Where is.... The most visited nature preserve in the State of Indiana? Submitted by Ron Howard**

Located on the Western border of Indiana in Fountain County is The Portland Arch Nature Preserve, known for its natural bridge, carved by water through a ridge of Mansfield sandstone. This Hoosier nature preserve boasts most visitors of any nature preserve in Indiana. It borders the Wabash River near the little village of Fountain. Little Bear Creek flows through deep sandstone canyons in the preserves and eventually empties into the river.

Portland Arch, a National Natural Landmark, was developed into a resort area during the late 1800's through the 1930's and was made popular by the Wabash and Erie Canal business. In 1938, the owners sold the arch to the Piankeshaw Council of the Boy Scouts of America to be used as a camp for several years. In 1966 the Nature Conservancy purchased the camp. As a private conservation organization, the conservancy's aim was to protect the natural values of this unique area. The conservancy ultimately transferred title to the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Division of Nature Preserves. In 1972 it was established that the preserve contained 253 acres.

In June 2002 the Indiana Heritage Trust approved for acquisition of a 142-acre addition to The Portland Arch Nature Preserve. This new addition, known as "The Miller-Campbell Memorial Addition" was dedicated on April 26, 2003 to the memory of Sam Miller and Ron Campbell, whose passions for Portland Arch and Indiana's nature preserves offer a legacy of personal commitment and excellence.

Ron Campbell was a DNR employee who was property manager for the preserve. Portland Arch was among his favorite natural areas and was dedicated to raising public awareness of and respect for the site's historical, ecological, and educational significance. When he died in 1994, his ashes were scatter over Portland Arch.

But nobody knew the Portland Arch State Nature Preserve better than Sam Miller, nor loved it more dearly. Sam was involved with the preserve from its beginning and served as a volunteer steward for thirty years. Not only did Sam give tirelessly of his time and effort to the nature preserve, he was active in the Audubon Society, worked with young people through the school's as well as the 4-H programs, and was active in church and community activities. He served as the president of the Fountain County Park Board and was the primary participant in the development of the Five Crossings Park located along the banks of the Wabash River in Covington. Sam was also a charter member of the Wabash River Heritage Corridor Commission and served several years as Fountain County's commissioner.

Anyone who knew these two men was aware of their tremendous love of nature and its preservation, as well as their deep devotion to this cause, knows it was only fitting that this new addition to the Portland Arch Nature Preserve be named for and dedicated to the memory of Sam Miller and Ron Campbell on April 26, 2003.

### **Little River Wetlands Project Submitted by Paul McAfee**

Imagine, if you will, a twenty square mile wetland in Allen County with tens of thousands of ducks, geese, and swans stopping by every spring and summer. Rare plants and animals such as orchids, black terns, and otters abound in this area.

This is exactly what the Little River Wetlands area was like 150 years ago. Southwest of Fort Wayne and extending all the way to Huntington, the Little River (Little Wabash) was a short stream that encompassed a tremendous wetlands complex.

In the progressive attitude of the day, the river was ditched and straightened and the wetlands were drained in what was the largest and most aggressive drainage project in all of Indiana. A tour of the area will show some of this area's deepest ditches. The banks of some of them are diked and the water is actually pumped up into them to accomplish the necessary drainage.

Currently, the area is farmed with some remnant wetlands still remaining. Fox Island County Park is located near the east end of the area providing a sample of what the area was like and could be again.

The Little River Wetlands Project is committed to protecting the remaining wetlands and restoring some sections. We are currently working on a trail from Fox Island to a wetland area that has been restored along Yohne Road. We have also purchased 200 acres of land near the town of Aboite that will be easily restored to a nice wetland area and will become home to an abundance of wildlife.

If you have any questions or comments, or would like a tour of the area, please feel free to call our office at 260-434-0728. Our web site is [www.lrwp.org](http://www.lrwp.org). We are always looking for support and invite you to become a member. This is an area worth protecting that will become a natural area for all to enjoy.

### **Reflections on MiamisFort Submitted by Ken Einselen**

I met with an individual recently who was intimately involved with the conception and realization of MiamisFort Park: Bruce Embry. Mr. Embry was inspired by his grandchildren's excitement with Manitou Mountain, the huge play structure in Rochester City Park and decided to pursue a similar project in Peru, Indiana. Mr. Embry contacted the Rochester Park Department to learn more about the development of Manitou Mountain and then searched for a location in Peru for a similar facility.

The redevelopment commission in Peru had several acres of property along the Wabash River that had once been railroad property. The commission was seeking developers for the property and there were diverse opinions on how to use the land. Mr. Embry attended one of the City Council meetings when a discussion of proposed land use was developing and he presented his vision for a children's play structure and showed those present several photographs of other play structures. The meeting recessed while those present poured over the photos. The idea for a play structure caught fire and the redevelopment commission, not accustomed to working with playgrounds, gladly turned the project over to the Peru City Park Department.

Much of the success for the park rests on the design process that included a community design day for developing a design for the park and establishing "community" ownership of the facility. Ownership of "MiamisFort" was enhanced with a naming contest and culminated in a building blitz that lasted five days at the end of September 2000. Mr. Embry said that he had never been so tired in his life on Sunday evening when MiamisFort Park was completed. He also said that this project utilized everything that was taught in the leadership course he works with.

MiamisFort Park is located on West Canal Street adjacent to the River Walkway in Peru, Indiana. Mr. Embry looks forward to expanding the River Walkway and connecting the Depot at Broadway with West City Park. The River Walkway is getting a lot of use as is the MiamisFort Park and extending the walkway to West City Park and the Nickel Plate Railroad Trail would be a great achievement for the City of Peru.

### **Wabash River Heritage Corridor Commission Annual Report**

The Wabash River Heritage Corridor Commission (WRHCC) proudly represents the Wabash River, Indiana's State River. The WRHCC is a state commission that was authorized by the Indiana General Assembly in 1991. The WRHCC's mission is to protect and enhance the natural, cultural, historical, and recreational resources and encourage sustainable development of the corridor. Representatives from 19 counties within the Wabash River Corridor, along with a representative from the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, serve as the voting body of the Commission. Overall the Commission works in cooperation with several local, state, and federal agencies in addition to landowners and non-profit and private organizations. Goals for the WRHCC are to promote the improvement of the natural environment, recreational opportunities, and historical/cultural resources within the corridor. The following are the accomplishments for the year 2003.

#### ***Secured funding for fiscal year 2003-2005***

The Wabash River Heritage Corridor Commission, with the assistance of key legislators, secured funding for operating costs and the executive director's services for the fiscal year 2003 - 2005. Obtaining these monies was significant due to the serious cuts the state budget faced. Securing the funds also allows the WRHCC to maintain its office in Lafayette.

### ***Grant Assistance***

The WRHCC has subscribed to the Foundation Center's Online Directory of Foundations. With this subscription the WRHCC is able to help communities and organizations find foundation that may help fund their projects. The online directory is designed to search for foundations based on the criteria established by the grant seeker.

### ***Corridor Management Plan***

The final edits to the Corridor Management Plan are currently taking place. The public has access to comment on the draft plan via the Internet on the WRHCC website ([www.in.gov/wrhcc](http://www.in.gov/wrhcc)). The final draft of the plan will be posted on the WRHCC website in early 2004. The purpose of the Corridor Management Plan is to serve as a guide to Heritage Corridor Communities and the Commission for achieving their shared vision of the corridor.

### ***Teach the Wabash River***

The Commission held a Teach the Wabash River Symposium on April 11th in Huntington, Indiana. The symposium was the product of a partnership with the Historic Forks of the Wabash, the Education Committee of the WRHCC, Wells County Foundation and Dale & Huffman Law Firm. Over 30 individuals took part in the program. The purpose of the symposium was to get educators and youth organizers interested in incorporating the Wabash River into their curriculum and service projects. The presenters from the symposium provided several suggestions on how the Wabash River can be brought into the classroom and to young people.

### ***Water Trail***

The Commission has formed a Water Trail Committee to advance the progress of the Wabash River Water Trail. The Water Trail Committee has formed a partnership with the Banks of the Wabash to provide additional assistance to the project. Currently the Banks of the Wabash has been awarded over \$4,000 in grants to develop the signs that will tie the water trail together. Additional support for the project will come from DNR-Divisions of Outdoor Recreation and Fish and Wildlife, Purdue University – Landscape Architecture Department and Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D) offices. The Water Trail Project will when finished provide signage at each of the public access points along the Wabash River in order to assist water trail users in boats, canoes and kayaks to plan their river trip. The signs will indicate where the public access points are on the river, their distances from each other, and amenities available at each point.

### ***Newsletter***

In addition to the annual newsletter entitled *L'Esprit de Ouabache*, the Commission has created an electronic newsletter, *Wabash Reflections*, to serve as a vehicle to keep the public informed about happenings along the river and provide interesting articles concerning historical people and cultural events that are connected to the river and its corridor. *Wabash Reflections* will be distributed approximately 6 times a year. The *L'Esprit de Ouabache* is distributed to a mailing list of over 1000 interested individuals.

### ***Riverwatch Grant***

The WRHCC was awarded a Hoosier Riverwatch Grant to perform water quality testing on the Wabash River. The grant provided the WRHCC the necessary equipment to perform tests to monitor the water. Initial testing has taken place in Sullivan and Posey County.

***Events***

The WRHCC was fortunate to have participated in the following events: International Heritage Conference in Pittsburgh, PA, Mid America Trails and Greenways Conference, Indianapolis, Big Rivers Workshop, Burlington, IA, Indiana Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts Conference, Indianapolis and serve as one of the sponsors of Sullivan County's Eighth Grade Wabash River Expedition.

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